

never get hold of the bad or trashy, not by forbidding it, but by making them love the good and noble. I think a volume recommending books for the children and adults might with advantage fill a corner of your Magazine. Naturally children should also have their books of fairy tales and adventures as well as the more solid reading, but space forbids my dwelling on that as well as on that other and distinct "art of reading," the art of clear and correct enunciation and true expression.

H. F.

SHORT SKETCH OF THE GROWTH OF NATURE-POETRY FROM THE TIME OF POPE.

"All Nature is but Art unknown to thee" is the impassive statement of Pope, nor does he help one by his writings to find "the life . . . that warbles through the vernal flood." It is not to such a poet as Pope that a lover of Nature turns for words to express "the new, deeper feelings of the universe"—for descriptions harmonising with thoughts inspired by a loving gaze upon what Kingsley calls "the countenance of God," and Goethe "the open secret." Rather under the influence of the exquisite poetry of Spring does one feel the touch of truest sympathy with Nature in such lines as those of Wordsworth:

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

And yet Pope gives us in that line of his a great Truth. All Nature is Art, and to many of us who feel that a closer acquaintance with her wonders brings an ever deepening realisation of our ignorance, she does seem almost "unknown." Yet, how much less unknown to us who, living in these days, can drink in the delights of Cowper and Coleridge, of Shelley and Byron, of Wordsworth and Tennyson, not to mention a host of others, than to our ancestors of the first half of the eighteenth century!

But how has this change in the spirit of poetry come about? Is this revelling in the sweets of Nature a phenomenon of modern birth, or has it been gradually and silently growing up in our

Literature? Slowly and steadily the love for, and close observance of, Nature have been taking their place in our national poetry, and it will be the object of these short papers to endeavour, however imperfectly, to trace that growth.

Just as the study of History and Biography reveals the working of certain Laws of Development in the character of nations and of individuals, so does a study of the works of our Nature Poets in chronological order, with due reference to the national history of their times, show the working of the same Laws. In a most delightful and instructive chapter on "The Teachings of the Pine-Cone," the Rev. Hugh Macmillan has shown how the figure of the *spiral*, which he calls "the highest of all forms," and which is so marked in the construction of the Pine-Cone, is predominant throughout Nature. "The spiral," he says, "is the circle infinitely continued,—identified with no department of creation in particular, but a cosmical law." And it would seem to be in accordance with some such Law as this that these Nature Poets of ours have gradually drawn the spirit of man outward and upward until (to quote the words of our late Poet-Laureate) we see "the whole earth bound with gold chains about the feet of God."

There was but little love of Nature for her own sake in the poets of the Tudor period, and indeed to our ancestors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the few years when their passionate natures were not absorbed in a hand-to-hand struggle for religion for fatherland, for liberty, and for home, the town as opposed to the country was "the centre and circumference" of work and interests. When in men's ears rang the call to war and party strife, what influences were left to foster the gentler and more peaceful art of Nature-Song?

But, "the old order changeth," and with the Restoration came a time of at least partial peace, and men had leisure and inclination for researches in many branches of Science. The Royal Society founded in the time of Charles II. aided much in opening up the vast fields of Natural Science. Astronomy, Chemistry, Botany, Zoology, Vegetable Physiology, and Mineralogy all claimed the attention of able scientists, and Pope only expressed what must have come to be a very general idea of his time when he said "All Nature is but Art unknown to thee." He was the great exponent of the critical school of Poetry, and though in this line, from his *Essay on Man*, he may be said to have given the "leading note," it is not until the closing years of his life that others began to write in the fresh key, and work out the exquisite harmonies of Nature,

"Then, an entirely new impulse came upon poetry, and changed it root and branch. It arose in Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd*, 1725, and in Thomson's *Seasons*, 1730."

Of the writer of *The Seasons* we find Johnson saying "He looks on Nature and on life with the eye which Nature bestows only on a poet—the eye that distinguishes in everything presented to its view whatever there is on which imagination can delight to be detained, and with a mind that comprehends the vast and attends to the minute." We forget the cold philosophy of the critics as we listen to the Nature-Songs of Thomson. Real Songs they are, for Carlyle points out that every true Poet *thinks musically*—"see deep enough," he says, "and you see musically; the heart of Nature being everywhere music if you can only reach it." Listen to these fragments of the "Spring" song.

"The hoar-frost whitens, and the juley groves
Put forth their buds, unchilling by degrees,
Till the whole leafy forest stands displayed
In full luxuriance in the sighing gales."

"Now from the tower
Hurled in smoke and sleep and noiseless slumbers,
Off let me wander o'er the dewy fields."

Follow him as he climbs the hill to see

"The country—'one boundless blish, one white empurpled shower
Of mingled hues, where the raptur'd eye
Hurries from joy to joy."

Hear him describe the course of shower and sunshine on an April day; we have it all, point by point—the massing, heaping on heaps, of the doubling vapour—the settled glass sitting on the horizon; the expectant silence of herd and flock and birds, when not even a breath "turns the many twinkling leaves of Aspen tall," and when e'en mountains and vales and forests seem impatient to demand the promised sweetness and receive "the wish of Nature;" then "siftly shaking on the dimpled pool prelude drops, the clouds at last consign their treasures to the fields." Then follows the picture of the downward sun looking out effulgent from amid the flush of broken clouds, and streaming through the forest where it "in twinkling myriads lights the dewy gems." Later on he takes us through "the finished garden" with all its decayed wealth of spring flowers, and it is interesting to note in passing how many of our present garden-favourites are mentioned there. Through all the varying phases of Summer he takes us—refulgent Summer—child of the Sun, from whose "scented look the turning Spring accepts her

blushful face." Then through Autumn and Winter we pass, and stiff and pedantic as many of his lines may seem to us, yet all the time we feel there are the *ideas*, living, glowing ideas, underlying all his poetry, and had he lived some seventy years later he too would have been buoyant and free in style. He owns his inability worthily to describe the scenes before him and exclaims:

"But who can paint
Like Nature? Can Imagination bear
And its gay creation burn like hers?
Or can it match them with that matchless skill
And lose them in each other, as appears
In every bud that blows?"

And at times we find him throwing off entirely the self-consciousness so evident in much of his weak and simply letting Nature wake within him the chords of tender, enthusiastic, loving description. Nor should we fail to read the noble hymn following the *Seasons*, in which he gathers up in short form some of the many thoughts suggested to him by watching Nature through the course of one of her unchanging cycles.

"These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
Are thine the varying God! The rolling year
Is full of thee."

His great idea as a poet is to make men "look through Nature up to Nature's God." And yet it has been well said that with Thomson we stand only on the threshold of the Temple of Nature.

In a delightful book by the Rev. Stopford Brooke, on *Theology in the English Poets*, he shows us where the great difference lies between such a Nature-Poet as Thomson and the Shelley and Wordsworth of a later time. The one "stands aside and apostrophises Nature," the others are "absorbed into Nature and their voices become the voice of Nature herself." With this thought for our guide, and remembering that the change came slowly, we are able to trace it step by step in the works of the succeeding poets Gray (1713-1771), Collins (1710-1756), Goldsmith (1730-1774), and Warton (1714-1790), and notes on some of their works will form the subject-matter of the next paper.

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